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AT THE CROSSROADS

MOTHER GODDESS CULT-SITES IN ANCIENT INDIA

By D. D. Kosambi

PART I

1. The Problem. The chain of incident and action in Śūdraka's deservedly popular drama *Mṛcchakaṭika* commences with a peculiar ritual on a dark night. The hero Cārudatta, an impoverished but virtuous brahmin caravan merchant, has just finished his evening prayers. At the beginning of the first act, he asks his clownish brahmin friend Maitreya to help in the consummation : *kṛto mayā gṛhadevatābhyo baliḥ ; gaccha, tvam api catuṣpathe mātṛbhyo balim upahara.* " I have completed the *bali* (food-)offerings to the household gods ; go thou, offer (this) *bali* to the Mothers at the crossroads." This simple request leads to the rescue of the heroine Vasantasenā from abduction. Here we leave the development of the plot, to investigate the ritual.[1]

The *bali* destined for the anonymous Mother-goddesses was a ball of cooked food. It had to be offered at nightfall and another could place it at the crossways on behalf of the person who made the prayer. The context shows, however, that the crossing of two city streets would not serve : a highway (*rājamārga*) outside the town had to be crossed. That this was an ordinary performance at the time of the play is clear from the absence of comment either in the play or elsewhere. The period is in some doubt, but the first four acts of the *Mṛcchakaṭika* are borrowed closely from the fragment (*Daridra-*)*Cārudatta*, ascribed to Bhāsa. This earlier play supplies the essential (and doubtless original) detail that Cārudatta was performing his divine worship on the sixth day of the (dark half of) the lunar month : *saṭṭhī-kida-devakayyassa.* In both plays, the moon rises a little later, at the end of the first act—just in time to light the heroine on her way home when the hero discovers that he has not even oil for a lamp in his poverty-stricken home. The *Mṛc.* reading is *siddhī-kida*, but the commentator Pṛthvīdhara reports a variant to mean *ṣaṣṭhī-vrata-kṛta-*. The instruction *catuṣpathe mātṛbhyo balim*

[1] For the background : V. S. Sukṭhaṇkar, *Studies in Bhāsa* : Memorial Edition (Poona, 1945), vol. ii, pp. 81–183 and 347–52 (or *Q. J. Mythic. Soc.*, 1919, and *JAOS*, 42.59.74). The second chapter of my *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956) might be found useful, as well as the eighth.

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upahara is in both dramas. So (without joining in the controversy) we are justified in the assumption that the custom antedates the Gupta period. It was widespread and generally understood. Surprisingly the particular ritual occurs nowhere in the brahmin scriptures otherwise so meticulous over every detail of any household cult.

The *Manusmṛti* (3.81–92) describes the daily Vaiśvadeva food-offerings in full. One of the food-balls is specially offered to the *pitṛs* = the Fathers, taken to mean the souls of departed paternal male ancestors. The last in the series is to be placed on the ground for dogs, outcastes, and wretches afflicted with (incurable) disease in punishment for some transgression in a previous birth. There is no mention of the group of Mothers, not even to accompany the Fathers; and nothing about the crossroads. P. V. Kāṇe's compendious *History of the Dharmaśāstra* [1] gives full details of the evening *bali* food-offerings (2.745 ff.), without reference to this particular rite; the Mothers and their *bali* receive perfunctory mention in 2.217–18, in keeping with the author's general disregard for anthropology.

Literary sources will not help us much. That some rite like Cārudatta's was current and familiar in the early seventh century should be inferred from Bāṇa's casual phrase: *niśāsv api Mātr-bali-piṇḍasyeva dikṣu vikṣipyamāṇasya* (*Harṣacarita* NSP. ed. p. 223). There is no mention of the crossroads; the *piṇḍa* to the Mothers is to be scattered into the outer darkness in all directions. Varāhamihira's *Bṛhat-saṃhitā* gives full details about iconography, prognostication, and divination, without enlightening us upon the point in question. He says (*Bṛ.* 58.56) only that each of the mother-goddesses should be given the attributes of that god whose name she translates into the feminine; this is in the vedic-patriarchal tradition, where the mother-goddess is but a shadowy consort for the male god. Special priests (*Bṛ.* 60.19) knew the rites of the Mothers' Circle, *maṇḍala-krama*. That such circles had a physical existence may be learned from the *Rājatarańgiṇī* (1.122, 333–5, 348; 3.99; 5.55; cf. also 8.2776, *mātṛgrāma*). Crossroads, according to Varāhamihira, bring evil repute upon any house near the junction (*Bṛ.* 53.89): in *Bṛ.* 51.4, they are listed among inauspicious places, below the cemetery and the deserted temple.

[1] P. V. Kāṇe: *History of the Dharmaśāstra* (Poona, Bhāṇḍārkar Oriental Research Institute, particularly vol. 2, 1941).

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2. THE MOTHERS. In spite of Kāṇe's silence, there is a rite which antedates the dramas cited above. In Keith's [1] words, " A very odd rite is prescribed by the Mānava school, for the evening before the last Aṣṭakā : at the crossroads the sacrificer kills a cow, dismembers it, and divides the flesh among the passers-by."

The Aṣṭakās are domestic funerary offerings, made three or four times a year. As would be expected from the general tenor of Aryan ritual, the Fathers are the main recipients. The Mothers seem to have crept in as consorts, though assigned a separate direction of the compass. The significant point is the unique Mānava ritual, which would come about the sixth-dark lunar date. Why this was at the crossroads and to whom the sacrificed cow was dedicated whose flesh was to be shared by every passer-by is not explained. It could not be to evil spirits, or goblins ; nor is Rudra, who also haunted vedic crossways, graveyards, waters, etc., as chief of ghosts, named. For that matter, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.6.2.9.) invites Rudra at a crossroads sacrifice : " graciously accept it together with thy sister Ambikā " ; the conjoint nature of the offerings is emphasized and " explains " their name *Tryambakāḥ*, though Rudra is himself Tryambaka. Ambikā means " little mother " and is elsewhere one of the three mothers of Tryambaka ! The presumption is strong that the Mānava sacrifice was for the Mothers, not as mere ancestresses, but as separate goddesses in their own right whom it was necessary to appease, although vedic practice did not openly enjoin it. It will be made plausible in what follows that this practice was borrowed from the " non-Aryan " element in India. This would account for the recipients of the crossroads sacrifice not being named explicitly and for the rite becoming standard without benefit of the *gṛhya-sūtras*, as brahminism accepted more and more aboriginal practices. Finally, it also accounts for the crossroads, as will appear in the penultimate sections of this note.

The Mothers could not have been simple Aryan ancestresses, as dissociation from the Fathers shows quite clearly. There is, moreover, an ancient tradition [2] of mothers-in-common (without any father associated with them) that cannot be reconciled with vedic father-

[1] A. Berriedale Keith : *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, Harvard Oriental Series, vols. 31–2 (1925) ; see also pp. 145, 239, 322, 414, and 426 for references to trifling magic rites at the crossways, the haunts of evil spirits and occasionally of their leader Rudra.

[2] D. D. Kosambi : " The origin of brahmin gotras," *JBBRAS*, 26, 1950, 21–80, particularly the final section on survivals of mother-right in the Ṛgveda.

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right. It would be difficult to explain Pāṇini 4.1.115 unless mothers-in common were taken for granted by him. *Tryambaka*, later explained away as " with three eyes " means " with three mothers ". Though this appears physically impossible, the legends of Jarāsaṃdha born of two and Jantu born of a hundred mothers-in-common show that there was an undeniable tradition of many mothers with equal status, even for a single child. These legends were meant to explain away what to a changed society seemed fantastic : Jarāsaṃdha was almost certainly a historic king of Rājgīr. Several mothers who bear a child-in-common (without any particular father) is a primitive concept in some pre-patriarchal societies and the notion is present, surprisingly enough, in the Ṛgveda. But the *piṇḍa* offered even to such Mothers would not have to be at the crossroads, because the domestic offerings at eve are for the special deities and ancestors of the family. The Mothers of the two dramas were independent deities of some sort.

They were, however, mother-goddesses in a group, without proper names. The *Amarakośa* 1.1.37 does say that they begin with *Brāhmī*, but commentators do not agree either as to the names or the total number, which seems to have increased well beyond the vedic, whether three as for *tryambaka* or the seven never-resting (? *yahvī*) mothers of truth (*ṛta*), or sixteen in another early list. Two stages are combined in the Skanda myth, the theme of Kālidāsa's unfinished or incomplete *Kumāra-sambhava*. The young god was born (by intermediacy of the river Ganges) jointly of six mothers-in-common (the Pleiades) with a separate head to suckle each. (This might explain the three heads of Śiva *tryambaka*, whose image goes back to a three-faced god on a Mohenjo-dāro seal and who must originally have had three mothers rather than three eyes. Several confluent rivers could account for the many mothers as well as the polycephaly.) Skanda, however, was assigned the function of killing a troublesome demon Tārakāsura and recruited his army from goblins. He was also joined by the Mothers—not the ones who bore him, but thousands of others, of whom some 192 are named in the forty-sixth chapter of the (Vulgate) *Śalya-parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. Three of the names are especially interesting. One companion-Mother is *Catuṣpatha-niketanā* " housed at the crossroads " ; another is *Catuṣpatha-ratā* " in love with the crossways." Even more remarkable is Pūtanā. A demon of this name was killed by the pastoral child-god Kṛṣṇa whom she tried to nurse with her poisonous milk. The name cannot

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be a mere coincidence, for these Mothers-companion are described as with horrifyingly sharp teeth and nails, protruding lips, etc., all standard terms for female demons ; and simultaneously as beautiful, eternally youthful women. The cults were therefore undoubtedly pre-Aryan, though in process of assimilation. It would appear that the Mothers were easier to control through their child Skanda—invented for that special purpose—than by the imposition of violently hostile patriarchal cults.

There is still not enough evidence to account for the crossroads. Any explanation must take that *locus* into consideration, as also the progressive increase in the number of the Mothers, with or without names.

3. Information from Field-work. It would be easy to go through Bāṇa, the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, etc., to show the increasing strength of the Mother-goddess cult. It seems to me that this would not explain the rite in question so effectively as investigation in ehe field. The examples given here are from Mahārāṣṭra, it having been impossible to cover sufficient ground elsewhere with the same detailed inquiry. Similar information should be available in many other parts of the country and it is to be hoped will be collected.

The mother-goddesses are innumerable ; many occurring only in groups with no individual names. The most prominent of these are the *Māvalāyā*, water-deities, always in the plural, spread over the two tāluqās of Māvaḷ and Paün Māvaḷ. The name means " the little mothers " though *āyā* reduplicates " mothers ". It has been known in the region for over 2,000 years, *Māmālā-hāra* and *Māmāḷe* being inscribed on the façade [1] of the Caitya cave at Kārle in a Sātavāhana charter, so that the name Māvaḷ, in fact, derives from the cult. They have no images in iconic form, being represented by shapeless little stones daubed with minium, or by red marks on the side of a tank, or on a rock, or on a tree by the water. They become the *sātī āsarā* " the seven Apsaras ", beyond the two tāluqās, though even then the number need not be seven. Similarly, the goddess Lakṣmī-āī in many villages is a whole set of shapeless red-coated stones, apparently having nothing to do with Lakṣmī, the beautiful consort of Viṣṇu. Here is not a cult degenerated from that of Lakṣmī, called Rakhumāī in Marāṭhī and represented in temples by carved images paired with her husband Viṭhobā or Pāṇḍurañga. It is significant that at Paṇḍharpūr, centre of the Viṭṭhala cult, she does not share Viṭhobā's temple, but has a separate temple and worship of her own. The

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legend given for this separation is late and the economic reason of two separate cults supporting more priests than one cannot have been the original reason. She must have had a separate cult from the very first, as the mother-goddess (as the termination *āī* shows) without a consort, originally worshipped at Paṇḍharpūr, before the male god appeared on the scene. The marriage of these Mother-goddesses is a later phenomenon.

Every village in the region has at least one mother-goddess cult. Often, the deity is simply called *Āī*, the Mother, without any other name. Sometimes, she is named Ambā-bāī " Lady Mother ", which is a step higher and nearer to the classical nomenclature ; she is also Lāḍubāī = the Dear Lady and Kāḷubāī = the Dark Lady. There are also fantastic local names not found elsewhere (though later identification with Durgā or Lakṣmī is sometimes made under brahmin influence). For example, Tukāī (Bāṇere) is comparatively rare, though she is found in more than one place. Tukārāma was named after her. Jākhamātā should be the same as Jokhāī, with whom some people link her ; the name has clear etymological connections with *Yakṣī* and *ḍākinī*. Women who have died in childbirth or drowned themselves are sometimes allotted this cult as having turned into such a spirit or vampire. The establishment of a cult then depends upon its being demanded by the defunct, who shows her desire by appearing in some villagers' dreams. A crude, red-daubed, female relief at the end of the rifle range (beyond the Sholāpūr road, just outside Poona) represents such a cult of a nameless *telī* woman accidentally killed by a stray bullet, who would not let her relatives in the oil-vendors' caste sleep peacefully till a monument and worship were given her ; recent as the event appears to be, the annual *pālkhī* procession used to stop at the place on its way to Paṇḍharpūr and perform the *āratī* lamp-rite as a matter of course, till the route changed. A remarkable but not unique case of absorption may be seen a mile beyond Maḷavlī, near the village of Devaleṃ. The mother-goddess in her thicket is, as usual, several lumps of stone, coated with red ; but her name is *satī-āī*. Fifty feet away is the actual *satī* monument to an unknown widow of the feudal period who immolated herself on the spot ; but this is now called *gopāḷa-porā*, the shepherd-boys' dancing-post, because the lads dance there in a group on certain days. The primitive goddess has become identified with the *satī* and the cults have coalesced. A human *satī* may be forgotten altogether as such, though the monument remains

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identifiable by the customary (though not obligatory) bent-arm-and-hand with open fingers. If I am not greatly mistaken, two breast-like humps on top of a *satī* stone would indicate *sahagamana*: that the widow immolated herself on the same pyre with her husband's corpse; a single hump would mean that she followed her husband into the next world some days after his cremation, on a separate pyre: *anugamana*. Such memorials exist at Bolāī, as elsewhere in our villages. She may be only just remembered but receive nothing beyond a sporadic coating of red and an occasional flower, as at Devghar and Ambarnāth. The *satī* may be regarded as the special protectress of a village even though her name be forgotten as usual. This can be seen at Pimpḷolī, where a coconut is broken before her uncovered *samādhi* stone every Sunday and meat distributed as sacrament. Mr. N. G. Chapekar, in his *Badlāpūr* (Poona, 1933; p. 320), reports a crossroads' cult for a man of the Mahār caste supposedly killed by some feudal member of the Kuḷkarṇī family. The spirit demanded the particular location and receives the regular sacrifice of a goat, formerly of a buffalo bull-calf, from the Kuḷkarṇīs.

The *satī* and the *Sātī-Āsarā* should not be confused with each other nor with a remarkable, primitive, and dangerous mother-goddess Saṭavāī, or Saṭavī. The last is now also a term of abuse in Marāṭhī for an unpleasant woman. The word is derived without question from Sanskrit *ṣaṣṭhī* "the sixth", whatever her original name or names were. The goddess Saṭavī is to be propitiated on the sixth night after the birth of any child, with a lamp burning through the night and certain other articles (every one of which becomes the perquisite of the midwife at dawn) laid out for her. Among them may be the saddle-quern with its muller stone, but writing materials are always included. The goddess comes in person that night to write the fate and character of the child on its forehead in invisible but immutable words. This is brahminised as the *brahma-likhita*. Men have nothing to do with this ritual, though the power of the goddess is unquestioned. She is herself also the sixth date of the lunar month, which is her special worship day. Skanda, so peculiarly connected with the Mothers, is *ṣaṣṭhī-priya* and the late *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* personifies Ṣaṣṭhī as his wife. Finally, though Ṣaṣṭhī (or Saṭhī, Saṭavī) may also be identified with Durgā, she remains unmarried in popular belief: "Mhasobā has no wife and Saṭavāī no husband (*dādalā*)." Though a Mother, the goddess tolerates no consort.

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Mhasobā is the Mahiṣāsura killed by Durgā-Pārvatī, but still regularly worshipped at times near her temple. In Poona, where a live Mhasobā cult is to be seen at the foot of Parvatī hill-temple. Saṭavī worship occasionally manifests itself in our villages through the red spots left by a lady worshipper upon some out-of-the-way rock, often by the road or at a crossing.

The really rare names are in each case unique, so that one suspects connection with some diminutive tribal group now defunct or absorbed (without any other trace) into the general rustic population. Some are connected with the name of the village, e.g. Phāgṇāī at Phāgṇe and Tuṅgāī at Tuṅgī village, of which the latter may be explained as the high place, though the former has no plausible etymology. Others come from still more obscure sources. Such are the Karajāī at Indūrī, Phiraṅgāī near Ambī, Warsubāī beyond Junnar, Mhātryāī of Theūr, Udalāī of Neṇavlī (near the Karsambḷe-Sudhāgaḍ caves), Surāḷāī at Bhājā (though *surāḷa* = *surālaya* means " home of the gods " ; the village's patron goddess is Jākhamātā). The most famous of such unique goddesses near Poona is the Bolāī or Bolhāī who has a representative at Poona near the Sassoon Hospital, but whose real shrine is a mile from the village of Vāḍeṃ-Ghoḍeṃ, not far from Koregāo. She belongs to the primitive stage, for in spite of a temple built in the time of the Peshwās and endowed by the Gāekwārs, she has not been brahminized beyond being labelled a " sister " of the Pāṇḍavas. At least one goat is sacrificed to her every Sunday (her special day), in addition to any blood-sacrifice some devotee may consider necessary at other times. She is still a huntress who sets out on a two-month hunting tour in winter, symbolized by a palanquin procession at the beginning and the end. Her original cult-spot is shown, with her " kitchen ", situated about 800 yards away from the present temple.

That none of these goddesses have a male consort or " husband " proves their antiquity. The reaction reflected in the Mhasobā cult came with the development of a pastoral society, as is shown by the rare male god Bāpūjī Bābā, who is specially a god of cattle and whom woman may not approach without grave danger. One shrine is beyond Ahīre, in the National Defence Academy area, and serves five surrounding villages in common, apart from its casual help to people from a greater distance ; similarly near Khānāpur, across the lake. Another shrine is in the north-west corner of the walled enclosure of the crumbling Viṣṇu temple at Ākurḍī. A third can be

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seen on the Central Railway near Maḷavlī; and the Bāpdeo at the top of the old pass between Koṇḍhwā and Sāsavaḍ is presumably the same god. The much more popular Vetāḷa, demonstrably later than the goddesses but equally shapeless (though he is a Scythian-capped head at Chinchvaḍ and at times simulates Śiva's phallic symbol, into which his stones can be shown to have sometimes developed), is also not to be approached by women. If really orthodox, his male worshipper will avoid the touch of a woman or sound of a woman's bangles before worship. Slightly more tolerant is the monkey-god Hanumān or Mārutī, who is incurably celibate (though a powerful god among the peasantry as the Maruts were in the days of the later *vedas*); but women are allowed to worship him. The child-god Skanda, so obviously devised to bring the Mothers and their cults under male control, has not escaped this masculine tradition. When worshipped in Mahārāṣṭra under the name Kārttika-svāmin, women are forbidden to approach him. This seems to contradict the Purāṇas, but it may be remembered that the nymph Urvaśī, heroine of Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīyam*, was metamorphosed into a vine for trespassing into a grove sacred to the god and hence forbidden to women. We shall see that this marks a forgotten stage in the development of Skanda and that the original tabu was quite different, as was the forbidden grove.

The next step towards union with the mother-goddesses is illustrated by Mhātobā, the patron god of Kotharūḍ village (now absorbed by Poona city like so many other villages in the past). The original god is a large, unshaped, red-daubed boulder on the hill-top, over two miles away. The villagers still go annually in procession to this spot, where the god is supposed to have rested as he accompanied cattle-herd boys from the village of Wākaḍ, another five miles away, where he still has a temple. Some pastoral migration clearly underlies this tradition. The really interesting development is that in Kotharūḍ village temple. Mhātobā has acquired a consort, Jogāī (who shares his worship), and some rudimentary features as well.

These gods are death-gods, too, and the goddesses also deal out death if not placated. They preside over epidemics. Devī = goddess is a name for small-pox. Mari-āī has to be worshipped to prevent death from cholera and Sītalā-devī is the goddess who can protect children from small-pox. The goddesses are all specially worshipped by women (though the priests may be men) during the nine days of

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the *nava-rātra*, beginning with the month of Āśvin (October new-moon), which is difficult to connect with the harvest; the harvest festivals being nearly a month later. Moreover, most of the goddesses are given special offerings. In the villages there are obligatory blood sacrifices, unless the cult has been brahminized by identification with some purāṇic goddess, when the sacrificial animal may be shown to the goddess but has to be cut up at some distance. Rarely, a bloodless offering may be substituted. Finally, the *ṣaṣṭhī* and moonless nights are also special for the worship of the goddesses; blood-sacrifices have been demanded (in fact are still occasionally made) on such nights. A reflection of this custom is to be seen in the case of the greater Jogeśvarī of Poona, the senior goddess of the city, whose image is clothed for the day and has a silver mask put on early every morning with one exception. For on a moonless night *tithi*, the primitive image underneath, is left visible and has to be given a fresh coating of red (minium-in-oil) pigment—obviously a survival of an earlier blood-rite.

The famous stanza *limpatīva tamo'ṅgāni* emphasizes the pitch dark essential for the various incidents that follow in the *Mṛcchakaṭika*. But a moonless night could not have brought out the hero's desperate poverty. The ball of food Cārudatta offered on the " dark-sixth " was called *bali*, which shows it was a substitute for blood-sacrifices, as were his Vaiśvadeva offerings. Cārudatta was thus following an ancient custom adopted during the centuries of assimilation with the aboriginal population. The only feature that remains to be explained is the placing of the offering at the crossroads.

4. Primitive Tracks. The shrine of any mother-goddess without an *identificatio brahmanica* is outside the village. Occasionally, and with her special permission, a representative stone may be brought into some temple inside the village to facilitate service during the rains. Only if it should grow widely fashionable, like the cult of Tuḷajā at Tuḷajāpūr, would a settlement develop. Otherwise, the shrine in the middle of a town means that the place has grown from economic causes while the cult-spot has remained unchanged. The most primitive mother-goddesses, excepting specialized water-deities like the *Māvalāyā* and *Sātī Āsarā*, have a " grove " about the aniconic image. Most groves have shrunk to a thicket of shrub worthless as fuel; but occasionally, as at Phāgṇe, the grove is quite impressive; people may not cut off a single branch, however great the shortage of firewood. The Ila-Ilā myth shows that such groves

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were primeval, originally not to be entered by men under penalty of transformation into a woman. As men have usurped the priesthood, this tabu has been forgotten here. (But the Sisterhood, the sacred grove tabu for males, and the punishment for a transgressor by his immediate initiation into the Sisterhood and necessity of living thereafter as a woman, all exist in parts of Africa.) The primitive origin and nature of extant cults is shown by the injunction (as also in the case of Vetāḷa) that the stone must be open to the sky and roofing it over brings grave misfortune upon the misguided worshipper. The cults must go back to a period before houses were in fashion and when the " village " was on the move. But the grove could not be moved, so that its site must have been chosen for other reasons than proximity to a village. What reasons ?

The more fashionable cult-spots are visited by numerous people out of all proportion to the population now resident in the vicinity. Bolāī, Āḷandī, and Paṇḍharpūr are examples. These local cults were, presumably, at or near places from which colonization occurred. But the colonization was not haphazard and these spots lie demonstrably on routes of considerable age. Originally these must have been the routes for the seasonal migration (" boolying ") of men and herds. Even now shepherds from Ahmadnagar district make such a drovers' round of about 400 miles on foot every year with their flocks. The routes, however, have now been modified because of extensive farming and shepherds are paid in measures of grain by peasants to fold the sheep on given plots of land for a night or two, to fertilize the impoverished soil. The pilgrims' route connecting Āḷandī and Paṇḍharpūr is still followed seasonally (beyond the time of pilgrimage) by a considerable vagrant population, partly because of the numerous intermediate cult-spots it links up, which make begging easier. A little investigation shows that many of the stopping places have deposits of Late Stone Age tools and that the route is certainly prehistoric. Though the fashion of the great annual Āḷandī–Paṇḍharpūr pilgrimage is supposed to be recent (from about 1800), Tukārāma and others performed it earlier. Bolāī certainly was on such a trade route, now but little frequented because the present Poona–Ahmednagar road passes through the next valley. But the natural caves at Kesnand, near Vāgholī, are also on the abandoned trade-route which, as well as local legend, connects them with Bolāī. Just in front of the caves, on the slope of the hill, large quantities of microliths have been found and are now

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exhibited in the National Defence Academy's museum. Theūr (where the first Mādhava Rāo Peshwā's widow immolated herself as *satī*) also has many unusually good microliths, was on a trade-route and important river-crossing, and has one of the eight autochthonous *aṣṭa-vināyaka* Gaṇeśa images that rank over all the other Gaṇapatis, at least in Mahārāṣṭra. Phāgṇe is on the Paūnā valley trade route (leading past Tuṅgī to the Sudhāgaḍ passes and Chāul harbour) that touched the Beḍsā and Śelārwāḍī caves (locally, Ghoravḍī caves). Similarly for the other examples I have given.

My field-work showed an unexpected number of cult-spots on gentle hillside slopes, nearer the valley-bottom than the top of the hill, but at a considerable distance (one to two miles as a rule) from the nearest village and present sources of water. They could not have been near any village clearing when cultivation by the plough came into general use. Nevertheless, the cult is kept up under difficulties, even when there is no shrine. Whether a temple has been built or not, these isolated cults show one remarkable feature: without exception, the location always yields a considerable number of chalcedony microliths (a little agate, too) in far greater concentration than any other spots near by. There are virtually no other stone tools. Among handy examples are the Ambā-bāī stone, aniconic and red-coated as usual, by the crossing of the Bombay–Poona road and the Central railway, on the track leading to the pass for the Beḍsā caves. Another is a funerary *samādhi* temple near Nigaḍī, by the Dehū area. There are plenty of others. They are not all mother-goddesses now, but there is reason to believe that even some of the male gods have been converted into their present form from obliterated Mother-cults.

The microliths have more than local importance, being identical in size, type, material, and technique of manufacture with those reported by A. C. Carlleyle in 1885 from South Mirzapore caves. They are known in other countries as well (V. A. Smith, *IA.*, 35, 1906, 185–195) and precede the age of metals. Tumuli in the near-by Gangetic plain yielded pottery, large stone tools, and microliths, but never any metal. The Vindhyan caves and rock-shelters show no other stone tools and their pottery seems unassociated with the microliths. Lumps of hæmatite found with the tiny artifacts were used to draw pictures on the cave-walls, which show that the toolmakers possessed bows and arrows. Apparently the caves were primarily store-houses, occupied mostly during the rains.

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Dr. (Mrs.) Bridget Allchin, who rediscovered Carlleyle's particular caves (*Man.*, 58, 1958, art. 207, pp. 153–5, and plate *M*), notes that " in all cases the occupation deposit, if any, was only a few inches deep ". The two crude drawings photographed and published by her show a manned two-horse chariot and a four-horse chariot respectively. The latter is under attack by two men on foot, one armed with bow and arrow, the other with shield and spear (? mace). The rider of the two-horse chariot raises high in his right hand neither the " shield " nor " solar disc " of Mrs. Allchin's surmises but a spoked disc. However, her conclusion that we have here a " record of a sortie most probably in the early centuries B.C. from some centre in the Ganges-Jamunā Doab into the territory of tribes who still used no metal " is quite reasonable. The sharp discus as a missile weapon seems restricted to Gangetic Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva legends. It was with the cast of such a *cakra* that the god struck off the crocodile's head in the *gajendra-mokṣa* episode and his dark incarnation beheaded the offensive king Śiśupāla of Cedi—a *Mahābhārata* kingdom somewhere in the region of the caves. The cave drawing proves that the missile discus was in actual use; it seems to have gone out of fashion as a weapon before the time of the Buddha. The chain of microlith sites awaits competent field archæology to trace it from its known base on the Gangetic tip of the great Deccan route.

The cult sites are not the only places in the Mahārāṣṭra districts where microliths—and only microliths—are found concentrated. The find-spots follow about the same level along the hillsides. The tools are not accompanied by any pottery and there is no point in digging or attempting to construct a sequence in most of the places. The soil has all been washed off the hillsides, now left bare or barren. The only reason the tools have not been carried to the river or badly scattered is that the soil was dissolved and washed away gradually. Inasmuch as it contains lime nodules, the leaching effect dissolved part of the lime and so helped to form a " floor " below the humus and topsoil. As the soil was washed away the stone artifacts moved comparatively little and those few feet must have been vertical. Otherwise the artifacts could not have become concentrated in such clusters on a bare slope, without a pocket. Below the floor similar though slightly cruder microliths are revealed by excavation or the bulldozer, but naturally without clustering. The movement stopped when the lime-impregnated " floor "—now the hard, bare surface—

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was reached. This layer corresponds in its own way to the much harder breccia in some caves ; it resists erosion even when wet and discourages vegetation. Nothing can be done for stratigraphy, for this hilly region has not the protective turf of Europe ; sometimes a sequence may be possible by the riverside, but it would often be misleading, for the topmost layers have often been washed down by the monsoon downpour off the deforested hillside, in which case the order will be inverted after a certain number of strata.

Following these microlith groupings along the hill, however, one conclusion was unavoidable. These tools represent the pre-metal and even pre-pottery stage, when the valley bottom was not cleared of jungle. The artifacts are often as delicate as surgical knives. A few of the finest flakes (17 mm. long and from 1 to 4 mm. wide, with carefully retouched edges) found by the Vetāḷa (whose cult is still powerful) on the high hilltop behind the National Chemical Laboratory might have been used for some blood-ritual, say initiation or blood-brotherhood scratches upon the votary. But the rest indicate delicate leather-work (for storage of produce), careful skinning of birds and small beasts, splitting withes for baskets, splitting of sinews, and castration of domestic animals. The last practice survives among the professional *Dhanagar* caste shepherds in Sātārā district ; their flint castration knives do not leave a septic wound as unsterilized metal would, a fact recognized by the Jews, who retained them for circumcision long after the common use of metals. The microliths also contain arrow-points and blades of other kinds, plus a few sickle-teeth. The whole assemblage is characteristic of what might be called Mesolithic economy in the older nomenclature, with herds and a little sporadic cultivation to eke out hunting and the collection of nuts, etc. Why no larger tools are found in association is not clear, even if they were of less weather-proof stone, such as basalt. The palæolithic hand-axe area is beyond Phaltan.

Such a population had to shift from place to place. Permanent settlement could not come before the day of cheap metals, i.e. of iron. It is difficult to imagine the use of iron as common anywhere in the Deccan much earlier than the Mauryan conquest. There are no deposits of iron or copper ore within easy reach of this region and the *Arthaśāstra* does not know of southern iron. The natural route of savages before the swampy or forested valley bottom was opened for cultivation would be along the level indicated, not as a thin foot-

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track but as a broad though irregular band with the passes as fixed points. The first cultivable terraces, seen in the valleys between Kheḍ and Manchar, beyond Junnar, the Muḷshī valley, and above Khaḍakwāslā are so steep that the plough could not have been used. For slash-and-burn crops, planted with digging-stick or by strewing the seed among the ashes, or for light hoeing, these terraces would serve and are still sporadically so used. That they are not modern is shown by the high gradient, the small size of the stones used, and by the absence of any knowledge or legend about their formation.

The groups that moved along these tracks could not have been numerous and would have been too primitive for land ownership. There could be no fixed plots till the plough had conquered the soil. For this, the fertile bottom lands had to be cleared of forest and kept clear, an impossible task in our monsoon country without iron tools in plenty. Land to the savage was territory, not property. Perhaps the still remembered Mahārāṣṭrian custom of *gāṃva-saī* went back to pre-settlement times. This used to be the propitiation (at such date as the *bhagat* might set) of all local deities, spirits, and goblins. The impressive feature was that every one had to go to live beyond the village (residential) limits for seven or nine days, during which the place would be completely deserted. After living in the fields or under trees for the period and performing the required worship, the inhabitants would return with the assurance of larger crops, less illness, and greater well-being. The ceremonial of return was conceived as a resettlement. The fixed cult-spots for pre-agricultural people would be where their regular paths crossed and they met for their pre-barter exchange with the ceremonial and communal ritual that always accompanied it, or where several groups celebrated their periodic fertility cults in common. *Thus, crossways are logically the original sites for the mother-goddess cults.*

(*To be continued.*)

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